

Student Press

1938

The Tangent: An Annual

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THE ONTARIO COLLEGE OF ART



TANGENT

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OUR THOUGHTS

to you in this 1938 "Tangent" as a depiction of our minute voice in the vast world of Art.

The production of this book was possible only with the kind enthusiasm of Mr. Haines and the Staff, the timely gentle reprimands of Mr. Carmichael and Mr. Murphy, and the co-operation of the students. We wish to express our gratitude to all.

This year our Students' Club of the Ontario College of Art has organized numerous groups. The Dramatic Club, according to the applause given their

productions, are showing promise. May they ever be successful! The Discussion Group are proving themselves able debaters on any subject from "the psychological reaction to colour" to "the flavour of Mrs. Merrill's onion soup". The Camera Club also has an enthusiastic following. During the cold winter months the Sketch Club's days were few, but a Winter Sports Group rapidly gained popularity.

These participations, we feel convinced, are widening our interests as a body, thus stimulating the individual work of the future artists of Canada.

—The Editor.



A NOTE ON EPSTEIN

A few years back Jacob Epstein aroused the traditionally stolid British public to a controversy which threatened the peace of the land with a colossal statue of the Christ. By habit the rather infrequent exhibitions of Mr. Epstein's sculptures are a signal for violent extirpation on one hand and perfervid praise on the other in the columns of the press devoted to art criticism. His creations are always news, and subject-matter for intellectual debate.

Within recent weeks he has struck again, to shock or delight the professional aesthete and the culture-seeking shop clerk, and again with a Christ, recumbent, as in the tomb. The situation created has the customary element of humor and irritation, the antithesis of the aura of

abysmal brooding which surrounds this last work. Without doubt, few people outside the critical elite "see" very much in Epstein's Sculpture. He is an enigma for most of us which never reaches solution, despite the almost frantic eagerness with which articles attempting to "explain" his work are consumed. Of course other sculptors (viz. Frank Dobson) are equally disturbing, but Epstein stands alone as the target of vituperation and the object of adoration in the world of modern sculpture, as Picasso and Dali in the realm of painting.

It would not be expedient to offer an apology for Mr. Epstein's sculpture, even in the familiar guise of "an Aid to Appreciation" if, as I believe, his work is beginning

to be felt, if not understood, as a powerful artistic expression. The novelty of his forms is less startling even now, and other aspects of his work hold the public attention. Whether or not any adequate analysis of a work of art can be made on paper, it should not be felt necessary, and if it is, then there is a deficiency in the work itself. Criticism of a work of art is condemnation to the extent that its function appears obscure and its utterance inarticulate. It is tautological to state that a work of art should do its own talking, and not lean on critical essays for its significance. However, without giving a psychoanalyst's detailed report, or cooking up elegant theories of race-consciousness and neurosis, and the garden varieties of insanity, it is possible to arrive at several fundamental conclusions concerning Mr. Epstein's art. These are offered more in the nature of general reflections on modern sculpture than as a revelation of the Epstein soul.

Life has a few deeply profound implications for Mr. Epstein, to which he raises monuments of equal depth and profundity. There is birth and death, for instance, and the immutable mutations of nature, the seed, the flower, and then the seed again. It is the essence within this process that he feels called upon to express, in its eternal movement, in its inexplicableness, and incomprehensibility except through art. Artists are men of perception, (and Epstein looks long and closely) and what insight he achieves into the motivations of existence he manifests in his work. The world of events he does not desire to

illustrate, or the familiar emotions that we feel in the daily round. He reveals the underlying and universal ties of humanity, our indivisible human oneness in the functions of life (Birth, conscious life, and death). He effuses an intense spirituality, monistic, and primitive in the sense that he relies solely on what he FEELS to be, and not on any isolated sensory knowledge. This is not to declaim Epstein's intellect but rather to indicate his absorption with the things we know most surely because we have never had to learn them, but feel them, each within himself. I do not think it correct to say he deals with moods, because he goes beneath mood to tap a more profound current, a less transient, less perishable, flow of feeling. Epstein's sculptures brood, undeniably, but brood eternally, for all men and forever.

What confuses and distracts most of us is the unrestrained individualism of his forms. Because the salient features are derivative from human forms, and are yet grossly distorted from realism, we are more disposed to ridicule than to a necessarily patient contemplation. It might be pointed out on behalf of justice, that no law other than the academic tradition prescribes careful reproduction of the human form in art. We are so egocentric that we dismiss every other aspect of a modern's work because the forms are not recognizable as replicas of what we have seen in nature. This is, of course, the prerogative of the public, and if the majority is ever right, it would be here by sheer weight of number.

Epstein shapes his figures so that they are externally compatible with the feeling which he wishes to make concrete. They are vaguely human, as the feeling is undefined and unreal. The content is subjective, and so must of necessity be contained in a sympathetic form; that is, a form subordinated to nature's realities, just as the feeling probes beneath the superficial emotions.

It is still a matter of question in my mind whether the artist can justifiably disregard any concession to the public's innate demand for representation in art. It is apparent, however, that the public or the artist will yield slowly, to achieve a greater harmony between them than exists now. Probably the public will lose its prejudice to so-called "modernism", in an understanding of the necessity for considerable latitude in the creation of form, and the artist will exercise more restraint in an effort to clarify his mode of expression. These are merely conjectures based on what appears to be a tendency of the present time.

The significance of Epstein's second Christ may be more clear on consideration of the above remarks. As Epstein probably knows, its purpose will go beyond the embodiment of the Christian ideal in stone, as the sculptures of Easter Island no longer speak for any cult or creed.

I do not believe that the name of the sculpture is important to its appreciation as a work of art, since its intention is inherent.

There are some considerations which belong almost exclusively to the sculptural problem, but which may pertain to the extent of the public's appreciation, viz.: tools, media, etc. Epstein creates in stone because of its three-dimensional character, and he never loses sight of the space-filling nature of sculpture. He prefers also to maintain and strengthen the monumental quality with which stone is imbued, and exploits its inherent solidity and durability to the limit.

For him the problem is not one of making stone replicas of men and women, with close regard to anatomy and proportion. This is obvious of course. His concentration is on the objectivizing of his feeling in the third dimension, using those forms which harmonize with the content. He carves the way he likes, which is the only way anyone ever creates a piece of sculpture, and retains only the necessary affiliations with nature, and these because the idea through which his feeling emerges must be one of common human experience. This is his way of creating a work of art, good if successful, only bad if it fails as such.

—Donald C. Stewart.



HARASSMENT

How the nerves of man are tortured on this Terrestrial Planet! Wherever you may go, traffic swiftly dodges in and out, salesmen smother you with propositions, and loud-voiced people crowd you in the down-town stores:—as if this were not enough inflicted on unfortunate man—some fiendish mind has given us the Candid Camera!

Why ordinarily peaceful human beings should so decide to make themselves a plague, is beyond all comprehension. From the seclusion of an unassuming lamp post they pop out, or slink behind you to await an opportunity to “click” that infernal apparatus. In the theatre where you settle back in comfortable relaxation, some detestable person, like as not, will

whip his camera out and thrust it in your unsuspecting face. Even the street-cars are invaded by these monsters. The quiet, harmless looking individual, who sits so meekly by your side, may at any time transform, and start “snapping” in all directions. Then you, no doubt, will scramble home as best you can, in a state of nervous indigestion.

Why should these miserable camera fiends disrupt our hapless world? Could they not take to knitting, or some such genteel pastime of the Middle Ages? But no, their insistence on leading the parade of nerve-wreckers, is all too significant of the annoyances of modern life.

—Betty Watt.



MISTER DOAKES

J. Anonymus Doakes was not born in New York's East Side, the Ghetto, nor Peoria, neither was he born of an Irish mother and a French father, on an American liner, in the middle of the Indian Ocean, bound for Shanghai; as are so many people of whom we read. He was born of wealthy parents, on exclusive Park Avenue. At the age of fifteen, after several successful years in private schools he enrolled at a local art college. Now his father rather unlike most parents, did not want his son to be a lawyer, a doctor, or the President of The United States. So young "Annie", as he was known to his friends, was not forced to run away from school and join a circus, or go to sea, or any such thing.

He worked when he felt like working, and did what he preferred to do. He never experienced the desire "to get away from it all", but on the contrary, he revelled in the social whirl, the "whirlier" the better! After four years of not so intense work, "Annie" graduated with all available prizes and honours. His father insisted that he take funds

and travel to Europe, or wherever he pleased, for further study.

At the age of thirty, "Annie's" paintings were in demand everywhere, and he might be termed the successful artist. He was happily married, and, would you believe it, his wife was not his high school sweetheart, secretary or model. "Annie" did not save stamps, original Dixieland Band records, old pipes, Van Gogh paintings or the like. He had no favourite colour. He swore he never wanted to lead an orchestra, be a policeman or drive a fire engine. He never asked people to the house to see his lithographs and had absolutely no opinions on psychology evolution, or "how to win friends".

It would appear that "Annie" was quite out of the ordinary. Perhaps he was, but in one respect he was similar to other men. He felt that he was intended for some definite purpose in life. However, there the similarity ceased. Most men spend years in doubt as to this purpose and many miss it entirely. "Annie"

discovered this quite accidentally. Along a wayside he chanced upon a delicate little flower. This fragrant little bloom caused him to think that here was something to be cared for and cherished. "Annie", ever irresponsible in his youth

now made himself responsible for its health and beauty. So he now faithfully watches and tenderly guards, that little flower which brought him so much happiness.

—Doris Slater—Donal King.

CREATION

Early in the dawn of Day, God chose a morning star.
"Go to earth," said He, "And choose for Me the men who live."

On earth the star was lost. In the palaces all was greed;
The jewels of fame gleamed selfishly.
From place to place he went, but evermore the clamour spread
Here and there were men who knew,
But something lacking, they went their way.
—Discontent and pain.

"All is lost," the star was heard to sigh.
"There are no living men upon the earth."

To the countryside he fled, and stopped in wonder to behold
The freshness of the beauty there.
Here were men singing at their work.
And at eventide in the quiet of the dusk,
Some would shape and mould the clay
into objects they loved so well.

Still others drew with paint and brush.
Beauty smouldered within.
The poets dreamed
And voiced their thoughts in verse.
Men sang joyously
The Song of Life.

The star glowed with happiness and lit the countryside
With a radiant light.
All the men in passing caught Something of that glow.
In after years men named it—Inspiration.
The star flew to heaven,
And kneeling at the feet of God
Told of all he'd seen.
"You have found the men who live,
"And this shall be their heritage.
"On them and on their children's children
shall shine the Light of Life,
"In them shall all things be created."

—Patti Visser.



ART IN THE ARCTIC

Very little has been written about the Art of the Eskimos. Having lived among them in Baffin Land, I will endeavour to outline briefly a few of the interesting things I have learned.

One must bear in mind the racial characteristics and natural severe environment which govern the Eskimos' mode of living. Throughout the Arctic they cling to the shoreline, loving their majestic country, starving or feasting and battling with the stark realities of life. They are typically Mongolian with a quaint and happy philosophy of life. Hardened by privation since birth, they do not complain, but take what comes, smile and are content. In their language there is no word for worry.

Their life being through necessity nomadic, unity and government of their nation, amongst themselves, has never been known, yet they live in perfect harmony

with each other. Only when a camp is threatened with starvation or some other peril do they turn to a leader. In times of hunger the best hunter, who has become so by his superior intelligence, takes the lead, organizes the camp into hunting parties, and by his fruitful efforts takes them through until the time of famine is past. When other difficulties arise, the elders of the camp meet to discuss, in a dignified and courteous manner, what action should be taken for the future. Thus one can see that there never has been a focal point to foster Art, other than home life and things of immediate use.

The Eskimos' art is refreshing in its distinct individuality. In all their work the elements of nature govern their conceptions. Thus it is found to be dominated by straight lines, giving the feeling of strength and solidity, lacking the roundness and matured finish found in a softer climate.

The chief form of art among the men is the carving of walrus ivory, and the embellishment of their hunting gear. Spears, harpoons, knife handles, plugs and other hunting implements are skillfully carved. Those which are decorated most are favourites, and used more often in the chase. Because of the constancy and perseverance of these people, these carvings are symbols of their great patience. Only with these qualities may a hunter succeed. With childlike simplicity they cherish these emblems, hoping their God will reward them for their virtue, as hour after hour they wait beside a seal hole to procure their daily meat, while Aurora plays above and stars go shooting into infinite space. They have carved with such crude tools as bits of iron, glass, knives and fashioned the instrument with their hands. Sometimes the modern saw or file is used, but even these cannot accomplish all, so they are among the world's most ingenious sculptors.

Both men and women carve seal-oil lamps from soapstone. The lamps are cut from solid rock, to form a hollowed out crescent shape. Little decoration is used, as the natural beautiful varieties of colour present in the stone is sufficient. Obtaining soapstone is sometimes difficult, and often they must travel long distances or barter with a neighbouring tribe for it.

Decorative sewing is done by the women. The clothes are made of the skins of caribou and seal. Sometimes the fur is scraped off, producing suede leather. The twine is made of the sinews which lie close to the dorsal vertebrae of these animals. With this they sew decorative patterns of

highly stylized or geometrical design. For example—the tall, spacious hoods and long-tailed parkas of the "Ivillikmut" are worked with designs of squares, horizontal and vertical lines. The short-tailed parkas and small close-fitting hoods of the "Acookitutmut" are decorated with circles and diagonal lines. When a new style is created the tribe will quickly adopt it. As the competition is great, women of other tribes will then strive to surpass it.

Long before the advent of the white man, with his coloured beads, the Eskimos used the teeth of such animals as bear, hare and seal for beadwork. These are sewn on hunting bags, worked in animal patterns, representing the hunter's individual preference. Lamp black, the blood of seal, or occasionally an ochre, are sometimes used to dye them, but more often they are left in their natural state. The beadwork of the Eskimos is advancing rapidly, but as yet it cannot be compared with the work of the Indians.

Through the lack of adequate material, bright colour does not predominate in the Eskimos' art. One can fully realize that under the circumstances, painting as we know it, is not one of their accomplishments. They do their drawing on tusks, with an incised line stained by one or two of their simple colours.

The Eskimos have an art all their own, which compares favourably with any other primitive race. They love all decorative things, and deep in their hearts is a thirst for a greater culture in art, which some day they will realize in full.

—Stanley C. Knapp.

CIRCUS STAR

With glistening white body, and silvery
 mane,
So sparkling and beautiful, on he came
The proudest of stallions did gracefully
 trot
To lead the parade beneath the Big Top.

So softly and slowly the music did play,
As he cantered, then trotted and started
 to sway,
But why did his hind legs never repeat
The dance being done by his foremost
 feet?

He slipped, then he slid and fell to the
 ground,
His appearance was then like a writhing
 mound,
And lo! he discarded his mantle of white,
Oh dire disappointment, mere men came
 in sight.

—B. W.

SUMMER EVENING

From base of tree and house and hill
Long shadows creep, and from the rill
As slowly creeps the misty haze
That marked the pass of former days.
Small flocks of birds sing their last lay
To gentle sweet departing day.
From harvest fields, tired folk return
From working there, content to earn
Their daily bread; and in each face
One can discern an easy grace
Common to men who till the soil
For love of it, not for the spoil.
With simple things may they be blessed;
May evening bring them peaceful rest.

—W. McCrow.



TRADITION AND EXPERIMENT IN ART

Tradition is surely no more than the fruit of successful experiment. In fact it would hardly be too much to say that tradition in painting is, in the final analysis, experiment.

To my mind this opinion is necessary because it establishes the idea of one single tradition sufficiently broad to include the most diverse kinds of experiment, but at the same time sufficiently narrow to exclude the manifold failures and heresies with which the course of every human activity is encumbered. I should like to dispose at the outset of the idea that there are several different and conflicting traditions in art, to which each movement properly belongs. We constantly see the best work of each movement separated by taste and experience from the inferior work and added to the main body of traditional achievement. Thus, within our own generation, we have seen the impressionist painters take rank among

the great masters and realist novelists and playwrights take rank among classical writers. And as far as anything can be humanly known, we know that this judgment we have formed on their merits will not be disturbed by the verdict of posterity. We ourselves are the creators of this thing called tradition. It is not imposed on us by any dead hand of the past, nor should it fetter the mind of the adventurous artist. If we are able to look upon tradition as successful experiment it becomes a living element in our creative work, living because it is ever changing and growing, and because its change and growth are our own.

We are accustomed to regard the history of art as records of certain phases of man's adjustment of his environment. As the centuries advance we see the emergence of a conception of art that makes the artist's function the recording of his personal adjustment to life. An artist's

work can never be greater than he himself, and an artist's stature is commensurate with his knowledge and experience. By knowledge I do not mean scientific hoardings, nor the pedantic accumulation of data. I mean the knowledge of things gained only by experience, intensified observation and an exceptional interest in living. No art or artist can have work, in my estimation, without such qualifications. Leonardo had it, as did Rembrandt and Hogarth.

Tradition to the artist means seeing freshly through an intense reflection of life and being as he perceives it, and surely this can only be accomplished by experiment. We see Raphael as a great artist because of the intensity of his reflection of the period in which he lived. Had he lived to-day undoubtedly his contribution would have been of a different order than that of the year 1515.

If tradition simply means a line of painters who copy each other, then certainly traditional art cannot be said to include such artists as Giotto, Michelangelo, Leonardo, Durer, Rembrandt, El Greco, etc. They did not copy each other. Yet they are all regarded as painters of the traditional type. This must mean that traditional painting is fresh, original and new, from age to age, and records the artist's individual response to the scenes and environment of his own country and time.

All this, I think, will be granted, so long as we do not get too close to home. But the moment we bring the argument up to date there is violent disagreement. Freshness of viewpoint was all very well in times past, but it won't do at all to-day. A certain naivete in Giotto is wholly admirable, but let anyone be naive to-day and he is immediately dubbed a freak. The distortion which Michelangelo and El Greco deliberately practiced is conceded to give their figures grandeur and rhythm, but let anyone to-day distort the width of an eyebrow by half an inch and he is accused at once of courting publicity through sensational methods.

In short, in recent years, the term traditional has performed a complete right-about-face. It is used to-day to designate the type of artist who is carefully trained to imitate the current styles of official painting—the type of artist, in other words, who relinquishes his own point of view and the right of experiment.

This leads me back to the premise that the artist has to select, render more precise and through his special vision give back something that has meaning, something that has a relationship to his generation, his life, his environment. Even more true is this of a tradition which, if it conveys nothing from one period to another, is misnamed.

—Charles Comfort.



ART IN GLASS

When King Ptolemy I asked Euclid to explain his art to him in a more compendious manner, he was told that there was no royal way to geometry. The same might be said of the art of glass painting. Great works are achieved only by perseverance. To be called an artist is to accept the penalties of the profession, along with its compensations. We have a double task before us, first to educate ourselves, and second to enlighten our public on the true values of painted glass. Our objective should be to set a flame of enthusiasm burning.

Recall to mind the awe inspiring majesty of the painted glass of Canada! Are Canadians a dormant people? We haven't yet awakened to the great possibilities in this creative field. True, windows are being installed, but for the most part they are like so many pretty pictures; lacking in the fine qualities of design found in early glass. What hope is there then in the future amidst the turmoil of this ultra modern world, particularly in Canada, for the glass painter of to-day? Has he lost that deep sense of serenity, that sheer beauty of design and

colour which characterized the work of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries? There is every opportunity in the twentieth century for glass designers. If through wars and periods of unrest came the magnificent and refined creations of the early painters, then we need not be deterred because of the chaotic conditions of the present. Canadians are as richly endowed with artistic ability as their predecessors, and seizing the advantages now existent, could do all that has been done in the earlier history of glass painting.

It has been said of windows of that period, that they seem to have something in them akin to a soul. They live:—do ours? Wherein lies the fault? Is it in the initial conception that we fall short, or in the harmony and intensity of colour? Art is becoming too commercialized. To achieve fame seems to be the universal passion. In our search for it, in the field of glass designing, we lost sight of fine ideals, and find ourselves groping blindly at the foot of the ladder. Had we turned back to the earlier work to learn the basic principles of the art, we might have reached the top. By no means should we adhere so closely to this age that we add no individuality to our work, either personal or national. If the artist could retain the finest attributes of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and still add something of value to contemporary art, then I believe we would begin to see the sun pouring through truly beautiful windows.

The layman naturally raises an eyebrow quizzically and asks why all this furore about glass painters? It would be impossible to adequately cover glass painting in so brief an article, so I will merely endeavour to point out a few of its finer characteristics.

The character of the art of those periods was as universal as was its Christian teaching. The theologian, the encyclopaedist, and the interpreter of the Bible helped greatly with the technical detail of the windows. The artist took the role of the interpreter of the thought, and when his creative powers were given free expression, he was able, from the very simplest forms of nature, to weave designs of unexcelled beauty. The artist was able to depict with freedom, action and emotion. Between the twelfth and thirteenth century work there is a slight loss of restraint and refinement, but a gain is noticeable in vivacity and facility of expression. They seem to have a perfect understanding of the limitations of the materials. Painted glass in that age, with its dignity and grandeur of conception, its depth and earnestness of expression, had never been equalled.

Speaking generally, windows are built up of a multitude of pieces of white and coloured glass. The early cutting tools were only hot irons, making the glass jagged on the edges. This was a great asset, the windows being made stronger by locking the pieces firmly into the leading. Glass undergoes three processes: first, the conception of the design; second,

the painting of the glass; and third, the firing and leading. To give richness and texture in detail to the coloured glass, design is placed on it with an opaque brownish enamel. This art has been erroneously called "stained glass." Stain was discovered in the fourteenth century, the white glass being painted with a preparation of either oxide or chloride of silver. When fired, this turned to an indelible yellow. Its use is comparatively small when the entire window is considered. Since painting with the enamel plays a more important part, the true term might rather be "painted glass".

Colour, the glory of the art, with its rich gold and sapphire tints, has been unequalled since the thirteenth century. The triated ruby, unknown in later glass, is a wonderful colour, each piece seeming to have its own character. The depth and intensity of the colours make you marvel at the skill in the craftsmanship of glass making that existed then. The artist was so much in love with the barbaric richness of his colours that he seldom insulted them with enamel, except where necessary for clarity in the drawing.

Since painted glass has been called the

handmaid of architecture, its mission is to beautify buildings. Think of the Methuselah Window of Canterbury, or the Crucifixion Window of Poitiers, and compare them with the crude and vulgar attempts of the nineteenth century, that develop, in some respects, out of all reason and proportion.

Symbolism, the soul of glass designing, which has been dead since the end of the sixteenth century, was so vital to the artist, that to them every form clothed a thought, and could not be separated. The ideal of the artist was not a transparent picture, as it would appear to be to-day, since "naturalism" has replaced the "symbolism" of early glass designers.

We could make our windows precious works of art, by striving along the right lines, both as artists and craftsmen. With a new outlook on the art of glass painting, let us turn our minds to creating designs worthy of the medium, and endeavour in the future to more adequately relate our windows to the architecture. Canada may then step onward to a greater appreciation of the true beauty of decorative windows.

—Margaret Park.

WATER LILY

Resting softly:
While stardust plays on petals white,
Reflected in the listless pool
And clothed in the soft moonlight.

So tranquil while all sounds are still'd
Save whispers of a breeze, so cool
Till night by golden dawn is kill'd:
A solitary lily.

—B. W.

ASPIRATION

To reach the heights of joy until I feel
My soul can know no greater happiness
Than this; all other things are less,
Only bliss, transcending everything, is real.
And then to sink to darkest deep despair
Till I have lost all hope and heart to sing,
To care what in the future, life may bring,
Or what wounds to greater pain I bare.
To travel calmly in a mediocre plane
With my emotions neither high nor low,
But held in check with an austere control,
so
That anyone would say my life was sane.
It is for this, that I would know
The greatest joy, the deepest pain,
And yet have trod life's peaceful lane,
That to my brother man where'er I go
I may say with truth, "I understand".

—B. R. Livingstone.



The following prints were designed
and cut by the students,
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11. Winter scene

Illustration by [illegible]





SCHOOL DAYS

By [illegible]





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A. D. Price



GEESE

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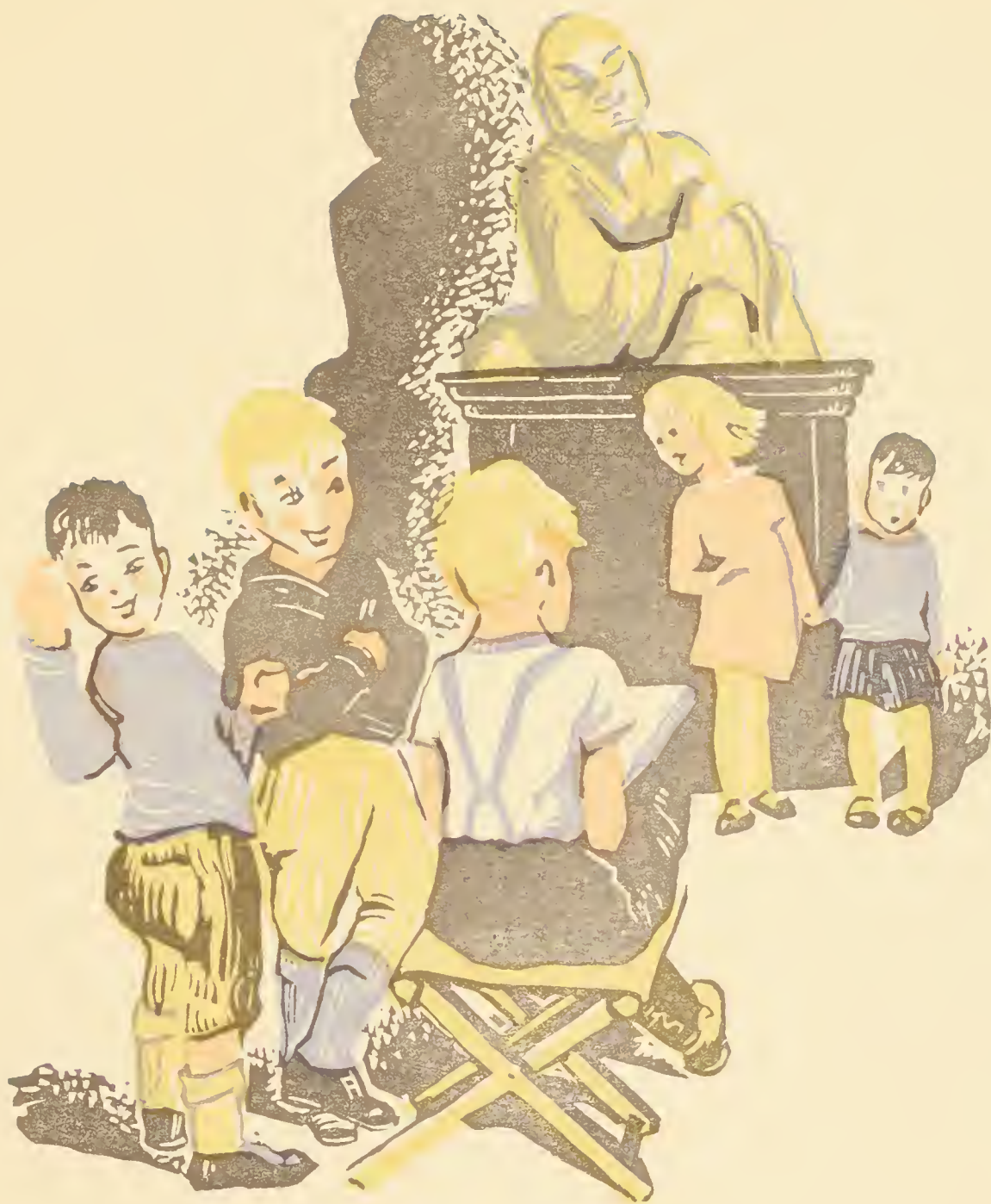
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THE CHILDREN



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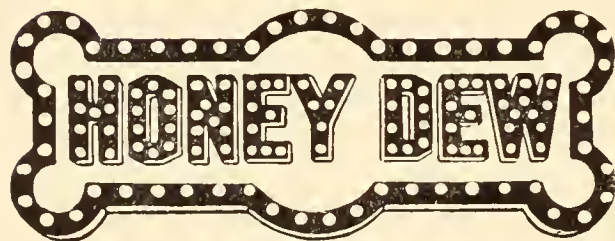
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